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# Keep it 100: Do the First 100 Days Really Matter?

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**Keep it 100:**  
**Do the First 100 Days Really Matter?**

**By**  
**Hallie Balch**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Department of Communications  
& Media Studies and the Department of Political Science  
Dominican University of California 2018**

## Abstract

When someone holds the Office of the President, possibly the most complicated job in the history of the United States, we expect a lot from them. Political Scientists Thomas Cronin and Michael Genovese point out in their article, *Paradoxes of the Presidency*, that Americans expect their leader to be someone that is a “common man,” yet also someone that is unlike anyone else, someone that is bold, yet reserved, someone who can unify the nation, but stand for exactly what their party outlines. The paradoxes are countless and even more impossibly, the American people expect changes from the President the very day he takes office. Through the years, the ways with which the success of a president is measured has constantly been in flux; one of the measures often used by the public and especially the media is the 100 day marker. This measure has not always been around, but seems to have come into use with the Presidency of FDR and since its inception, has only caused increased disdain with the presidency and a growing sense of distrust because of the amount of time it takes to accomplish anything of merit as president. This paper explores the creation of the 100 day marker as well as some questions surrounding it such as: what is it about 100 days that the public believes is important for a president to be measured with, why does the gauge show up only after FDR, and is there a better way to measure the success of a president than just 100 days of action? By using a case study of 7 presidents, Warren Harding, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama, and Donald Trump, this paper will be able to pinpoint the creation as well as benefits and consequences to having a 100 day marker of success. The conclusion will identify ways that may be more suitable to gauge a president’s success as well as how to avoid falling into the 100 day marker trap.

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## **Introduction**

Three months; fourteen weeks; one-hundred days. By no stretch of the imagination is this, 100 days, a reasonable amount of time for a person to learn a new job, to be successful at it, or to be productive with any certainty, leaving behind a legacy that an entire country can be proud of going forward. How much can one truly get done in this amount of time? The President of the United States of America is bombarded with a plethora of deadlines, policy options and methods of measuring his success from the moment he takes the oath of Office. From learning about an entirely new position, familiarizing with the office and staff, to creating landmark legislation. When examining various other, less complicated jobs, it is clear to see that there are few, if any, professions that are held to the same kind of standards that we project onto or expect of our President. For example, a college professor has a six year period before s/he may be reviewed for tenure at an institution. A medical doctor goes through four years of schooling plus additional time in residency, and must complete a set amount of hours before s/he can begin to work in what is still called a “practice.” An engineer is not expected to begin thriving in a new position until at least six months of learning a new system (have passed). Why then, is it imperative that the American people judge the President on 100 days in this position that demands so much? Might the modern media be responsible for creating an impossible standard, or was this a self-inflicted norm that came to pass with each President to ensure success and act as a check on the presidency? Whether the standards came first or the personal check-in system did, a president must not only juggle this accelerated time frame of action, s/he must also deal with the mounting demands of the public.

Scholars have studied and reported on these expectations since the inception of the presidency and some of them have found gaping discrepancies between what the public thinks

they want and what the Country actually requires from a president. Political Scientists Thomas Cronin and Michael Genovese point out in their article, *Paradoxes of the Presidency* (1998), that Americans expect their leader to be someone that is a “common man,” yet also someone that is unlike anyone else. Someone who is bold, yet reserved; someone who can unify the Nation, but also stand for exactly what their party outlines. The paradoxes are countless, and even more impossibly the American people expect changes from the President the very day he takes office. While scholars have created countless ways to study the presidency, the literature seems lacking in explanations for why the country, and the world as a whole, insists on judging a president after such a short amount of time in office.

Some of the initial questions that come to mind when studying the first few weeks and months into a presidency is why 100 days? When and how did this gauge begin to be utilized? Might there be a better amount of time with which to judge a president? By addressing these questions first, it becomes easier to understand the motives for the 100 day marker, as well as how it has positively or negatively affected the office of the President. There are many factors to consider when conducting a study about presidents: not only do their personal governing styles matter, but also political time, Congress, and goals for re-election. Each of these components factor into how successful or unsuccessful the first days in office may be. For the purpose of this paper, the main focus is on why 100 days is the mark. There is discussion about the levels of success for each administration, but the main ideas in this paper will focus on this particular time period and its genesis. The 100 day gauge, steeped in tradition is born out of the President’s

relationship with Congress and furthered by the media's role in setting the expectations for the American people. While this may be the accepted norm, it is not the most productive way to judge a president's performance. It is too rushed, focused more on approval ratings than actual legislation, creates a standard that cannot be upheld, and there are too many other factors to attribute success and even failure to.

The research question that this paper revolves around is as follows: what is it about 100 days that the public believes is important for a president to be measured with, why does the gauge show up only after FDR, and is there a better way to measure the success of a president than just 100 days of action? This paper explores those initial questions and addresses the creation of the 100 day marker. It uses a character based case-study of six presidents; William Harding, Franklin Roosevelt, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and Barack Obama to examine their first 100 days in office. The paper analyzes whether or not those first 100 days were successful in the eyes of the Nation by looking at print reports in major news media outlets and then comparing those reports to public approval ratings at the end of each of the six administrations. This paper does not find conclusive evidence that the first 100 days of an administration is the best way to analyze a president's success. However, it is imperative that the public begin using a new form of measurement as proposed in the course of this study for an array of benefits not only for the Office of the President, but for the collective United States of America. Finally this paper attempts to predict the implications that these patterns have for the remaining presidency of the current President, Donald Trump.

## **Background and Term Definitions**

Before beginning any study, and especially one with a surplus of political terms and semantics on the subject of government, it is important to understand the facets that go into making up not



only the Presidency, but also the US government as a body and to define a few key terms that are used throughout the course of this paper. The United States' system of government is made up of three branches: the executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch refers to the Office of the President as well as his Cabinet and agencies; the legislative branch is the Congress that makes the laws for the Nation; the judicial branch refers to the courts and the judicial system that keeps and interprets the laws of the other branches. These factions were purposefully separated by the Framers in order to keep one from becoming too powerful and to allow for one branch to act as a check on the others. This system, as described by Political Scientist Richard Neustadt, is "separate institutions, sharing power." This implies that although the entities are separate, they operate as a unit to create and pass laws for the good of the American people (Neustadt, 1990). The President operates in the Executive Branch and has the power to work with Congress on domestic and foreign policy. Countless studies have been conducted in order to attempt to learn what factors play into making a president more or less successful when he is in control of the trajectory of the entire Nation, but ultimately, what it often comes down to is the makeup of Congress and how well the President works with them and for them.

That being said, the President has the authority to create legislation that he feels would benefit the general public, the battle lies in his ability to persuade Congress that they should pass the legislation that he has proposed. This is why presidents are often seen as more of a figurehead than a policy maker because they have more influence in their presence abroad (working on peace treaties or visiting allies overseas) than influencing the entire Congress to support legislation that they have created.

The powers that are granted to the president as outlined in the Constitution are that the president is Commander in Chief: he has control of the military and can declare war at any time.

He can issue executive actions: orders which do not require approval from Congress, but can be overturned by them if the actions are unconstitutional. Similarly, the veto allows the president to dissolve a piece of legislation that gets passed through Congress. Though he does not have an excess of granted powers, the public still tends to believe that he has more influence than he does and this creates an expectations gap between what people hope for from the president and what he can actually do within his Constitutional powers (Malhotra, 2013). These expectations contribute to the way that a president operates when he is in Office and have an impact on the way that he spends his time in power.

The misunderstandings between the public and the president can be seen in a study of the first 100 days of his administration. For example, if the president campaigns on a various set of goals and promises the American people that he will accomplish distinct tasks for them in his term, people are more likely to expect this kind of action quickly. This idea is discussed in Stephen Wayne's book, *Personality and Politics: Obama For and Against Himself*, in which Wayne asserts that there are significant differences between campaigning and governing as a president and this can lead to confusion within the Cabinet as well as distrust from the public. There are certain skills that must be acquired and used for campaigning: fundraising, charm, and networking to list only a few and while those traits can be useful when governing, if a candidate does not swiftly learn how to govern, he will be easily overwhelmed by the many demands of his position.

This assertion is yet another reason why the first 100 days may be an illegitimate way to gauge the success of a president. The time that it takes for a president to get his feet under him, so to speak, and create legislation that actually has a positive effect on the Nation is far greater

than a mere 100 days and this becomes more clear as the case studies in this paper are examined to a greater degree. Another term for clarification that is used in this paper is the ‘personality of the president.’ This refers to not only the methods used to govern, but the way that the president presents himself in social settings. While it may be hard to get an accurate perspective on this one key element into the president’s personal life, it is important to account for it because it is an essential way that the president governs as well as how he interacts with Congress as well as how he is perceived by the public. Each of these factors in themselves also contribute to the success or lack thereof the first 100 days of a president’s first term.

Another term to be discussed prior to the literature review is ‘political time.’ This idea refers to the climate of politics at the time that the president takes office. It also accounts for which party has the majority in Congress and what kind of political events are taking place across the world and beyond the borders of our Country. John Kessel discusses this concept in his piece: *The Presidency and the Political Environment* (2001). Kessel asserts that while the president himself and his work style contribute a great deal to how the executive branch runs, it is often what is going on in the world around the president that truly creates the path for success or failure. He goes on to explain that there are five components that contribute to this environment: Congress, the media, economics, foreign policy, and domestic policy. These factors can have a small or big effect on the way that the president crafts his legislation and what issues he decides to tackle. This environment has the potential to shape a president’s policy agenda and may even change the direction of the entire administration. For example, George W. Bush took office and was running on a campaign to create more clean air initiatives when he got into office. He did this primarily because the public voiced a concern about the air quality and sustainability

of natural resources. Bush was successful in creating these new standards, and did so because it was what the people wanted, but he was in the middle of crafting more legislation to protect natural resources when the 9/11 terrorist attacks gripped the United States in fear. At first, this temporarily stalled his clean air initiatives, but later, those acts came to a complete halt when G.W. Bush shifted his entire focus to the War on Terror. For the most part, President Bush was well-liked by the public and had high approval ratings immediately following the attacks, however, as the war dragged on and Bush proceeded with his own agenda, the approval ratings began to plummet and it became increasingly difficult for him to regain the ratings that he previously held. Similarly, if the attacks had not happened and Bush did not have to deal with the rising pressure from both foreign and domestic needs, there is no way to tell whether or not public approval ratings would have been positively or negatively affected.

Finally, the media and their influence are discussed in depth in the course of this study and it should be defined as a collection of the various media outlets. This idea refers to not only different mediums such as print, social media, television, and radio, but also the differing news outlets that release such stories and conduct the studies for the public. Moreover, the public will be defined as the voting members of the United States citizenry. There is brief mention of the “public” in regards to the entire world, but that differentiation is made in that section of this paper. Though these terms are fairly broad, they are important to address in order to properly examine each facet of the presidency.

These terms are used periodically throughout the course of this paper and allow the study of the first 100 days to delve deeper into the aspects that truly make up the presidency as a whole. The results of this study have implications not only for political scientists and those that

study the presidency, but also for the media and the public. The many different forms of media outlets have the potential to allow this gauge to persist even if it is proven to not add anything to the success of a certain administration. Similarly, if the public were not so insistent upon bringing up the first 100 days of a presidency, or did not find this kind of media coverage interesting, outlets would stop covering it to the extent that they do. It is important that we understand the standards we subject our leader to and in order to understand those standards, it is essential to know where they came from and why they began.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction of the First 100 Days**

Based on the extent to which the 100 day marker is discussed in modern-day American politics, it would be easy to assume that the gauge was birthed at the same time as our fledgling nation. It is referenced in campaign promises, speeches by the president, and touted by the media as the end-all be-all of a president's success. In the spring of the first year of any new administration, the idea of the first 100 days is on the minds of politicians and laypeople alike and for some reason, it holds a great deal of power over the American public and media outlets. But where did this idea originate and how did it generate the kind of publicity that has the potential to affect a president's approval rating and the way that he is perceived by most of the free world?

This indicator, however, is one that has come to the forefront in American politics fairly recently. The idea itself was first proposed while studying Napoleon Bonaparte's rise and fall within his period of exile and resurgence as a power player in French politics. Bonaparte was exiled to Elba, a small Italian island, by the people of France and the superiors that usurped

power from him. It took him nearly 100 days to return from exile, rally a military, and set off to fight and lose in the legendary Battle of Waterloo. After this dramatic rise and fall, he was sent to a more secluded location for exile yet again. Historians use his ebb and flow of power as the first reference to 100 days acting as any kind of marker in politics. This instance goes to show that the first 100 days are not always a positive reminder of the deeds of the leader under the scrutiny of the public's eye and that history can remember the first 100 days any way that it sees fit.

The idea of the first 100 days came to American soil with Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 while he was in hot pursuit of the presidency. FDR made various campaign promises and mentioned in countless speeches that he would quickly turn the economy around upon being elected. In one of his campaign speeches of 1932, FDR laid out the plan for the New Deal; he called for a hasty “re-appraisal of values” within the US government. Political scientists collectively agree that this is where the idea for a 100 day tracker came from. Not only does it offer a check and a re-appraisal period to make sure that Congress and the president can work together for the same goals, but it was founded with one of the most effective presidents in short amount of time that the United States has ever seen. In his original dissertations, FDR is quoted as saying that Congress has a duty to the American people to turn the tide of politics to favor the common man; upon further study of these speeches, it is clear that he did not intend the 100 days to be a check on his personal progress necessarily, rather one on the government as a whole. However, when those first 100 days were completed, he re-visited the idea in one of his initial Fireside Chats and told Americans everywhere that he had kept those promises that he made early on the road to the election: “First, I think that we all wanted the opportunity of a little quiet

thought to examine and assimilate in a mental picture the crowding events of the 100 days which had been devoted to the starting of the wheels of the New Deal.”

Roosevelt was intent on revitalizing the economy and making sure that the groundwork for the New Deal was fully realized before any further damage could take place in the states. He also passed a groundbreaking 76 individual pieces of legislation, 15 of which directly created the infrastructure necessary for the New Deal. Within 24 hours of being in Office, FDR called for a four day banking holiday in order to assess the depth of the economic downturn in the Country and to turn the losses into profits as quickly as possible. The collective print and radio media outlets immediately picked up on the idea of 100 days and have used it henceforth.

### **Media Influence on the First 100 Days**

The media have been instrumental in making this guideline seem more influential and important than it is. Ever since the age of information began sweeping the political atmosphere before the 90's, the public and the media alike have been crusading to not only get inside the White House, but into the mind of the president (Treverton 2001). Depending on how much access the president and his staff want to provide to the public, administrations have the authority to decide how much the media can see; depending on who is in control of the administration, outlets may have a great deal or very little interaction with the president or his core advisors. If there is little interaction with the president, it is common that the media will emphasize the first 100 days because it is an objective way to judge the effectiveness of a president. There is limited literature about why the media have decided to follow the rule of the first 100 days so adamantly, but much of it has to do with the reaction it receives from the public. Often, Americans shirk the responsibility that is their civic duty because their lives become too hectic, or they feel

overwhelmed by the flurry of political actions being taken. Using the first 100 days gives the media a chance to list off the accomplishments and failures of the president in a way that nearly everyone can understand. Likewise, because it is such a recognizable term, there is often a great deal of interest surrounding this media coverage. As long as the public remains interested in the 100 day marker, big media will continue to report on it.

It is almost impossible to ignore the 100 day marker when it comes around in the spring of a new administration. In fact, the evidence lies on the news websites themselves. A quick search of “Obama’s First 100 Days” on the Washington Post yielded over 900 articles with reference to the gauge. A search of “Trump’s First 100 Days” on the same site brought up nearly 1500 articles talking about his actions and his successes and failures in that time period. This is one search on one website and shows the simple fact that there are endless articles with reference to a president’s first days in office and this is verification enough to show that the media is heavily involved in tracking the immediacy of a president’s action in office. Whether or not the marker is successful in measuring a president’s efficiency, it will take a great effort to erase the marker from the minds of the public and the media because it is so copiously engrained in the United States’ political atmosphere.

In this new age of technology and the ability of the president to reach the public directly, there may be some shifts in the way that the public views the first 100 days. It is clear to see this shift in reaching out directly to the public through FDR’s use of Fireside Chats; he was not paralyzed by waiting for news outlets to cover the moves of his administration, in fact, he was strengthened by an idea that political scientist Samuel Kernell calls “Going Public” (1986). This is a theory that claims that a president has a greater power to persuade the public to agree with



his choices by going over the heads of Congress and the media and speaking directly to his constituents. This can be useful in communicating his message because it is coming directly from his mouth or from his Press Secretary and his actions and legislation have less ability to be misconstrued in this way. This has the ability to relate to the first 100 days in one pivotal way: if the president used his ability to communicate directly to the public more effectively, there is a possibility that the public wouldn't be so heavily reliant on the media to recount everything that the president has or has not accomplished in his first few months. Ultimately, the problem is reduced to the fact that many of the recent administrations the United States has seen have not put a high priority on connecting directly with the people that elected the president to the Office he holds. Part of the reason Franklin Roosevelt was so successful was because he was viewed as a common man, one that any American could speak to and understand.

While it is true that many hold this perspective of FDR and his Fireside Chats, a collection of essays were compiled in which the effectiveness of Roosevelt's first 100 days were tested and many experts on the matter have raised questions about the necessity of his actions early in his term. The essays in the packet claim that Roosevelt may have "artificially created a crisis in 1933, used the analogy of the wartime emergency, and foisted economic regimentation and government control onto the American people." This gives agency to the fact that the first 100 days is not a good marker at all simply because it could have all been created to get the American people on his side and ignore the mistakes because everyone was operating in a crisis state of mind. Another author claims that while FDR did create a program that the United States needed, the success took much longer to accumulate than just the first 100 days of his first term. McElvaine argues that the steps taken to create the New Deal were not drastic ones either and did

not bring about any new alterations to the political power system. The author feels that FDR may have put a band-aid, so to speak, over the troubles of the economy and the government as a whole which caused various other problems to arise further down the line. Overall, Franklin Roosevelt may have constructed only short-term solutions instead of the long-term ones that the Nation so desperately needed.

Though there has been a great deal of speculation as to whether or not Roosevelt's first term was successful, it is not surprising that his administration championed the 100 day marker because he accomplished more in those first few months than any president before him. Similarly, one of the reasons 100 days is used is simply because it is a round number that packs in a great deal in a small amount of time. In the grand scheme of the entirety of a president's term, three months and few days is only a fraction of the amount of time s/he will be in Office. This kind of marker allows the president to set the tone of the administration quickly and accomplish some of the goals s/he has addressed in the course of the campaign.

When examining all that FDR did for the United States in such a short period of time, it is impossible to ignore the fact that he got 15 key pieces of legislation in place to set the New Deal up for success. Of course, one must also look at some internal and external factors that have the ability to make or break an administration. The makeup of Congress is a huge component that ended up being a benefit to the Roosevelt Presidency. On average, FDR had a 44 member majority of Democrats in Congress at any given point during his 4 terms. Nowadays, this kind of landmark majority is few and far between and because a president often cannot use a majority that doesn't exist, it makes the passage of controversial, or realistically, any kind of legislation, near impossible (Silbey 2013). This explains why many presidents feel the need to use Executive orders to accomplish their goals, despite the fact that Congress has grounds to overturn the

action. Similarly, states can sue or change laws in their state so that the action is rendered useless in their region. This is why FDR's work for the New Deal was so important; he managed to not use executive orders, but to get Congress to believe in his mission and his plan for success so fully, that they agreed with his legislation and passed it through both houses in relatively no time at all.

FDR was not perfect by any stretch of the imagination, and as was seen even in the review of the literature, there are political scientists and critics alike that believe that his first 100 days may have been a detriment to modern American society. However, the purpose of this paper is not to analyze the works of Franklin Roosevelt, rather to use his actions as a guide with which to analyze the idea of the first 100 days collectively. With that in mind, the aforementioned 3 components of analysis will be introduced in the case studies of this research and assert possible solutions and ulterior forms of measurement for the President of the United States.

## **Theoretical Framework**

I begin this section by explaining the logic behind my argument, followed by a discussion of why I believe the first 100 day marker is more of a detriment than a benefit to any given presidency and subsequent administration. This theoretical framework can be assembled based on the following case studies and the lengthy research done on this topic.

### **Argument and Reasons Against the 100 Days**

After the hours of research, comparisons, and case study work, this paper asserts that the first 100 day marker was created during FDR's first term and has been wrongly used to gauge the success of the remainder of a president's term. The following cases will show that typically, when a president has a successful first 100 days (according to the measures proposed), he will

not have a productive administration and conversely that when a president does not have a successful first 100 days, he is more likely to be more active in the time he has left in office. This should show researchers that the pressure to perform in the first 100 days of a presidency is more detrimental to the remaining time in office because if that pressure is taken away, the president is given more freedom to be successful in his time in office. While it may seem that the idea of a successful first 100 days does not lead to a successful remainder of the administration, below the correlation is briefly dissected and explained.

In simplified terms: imagine a world where the president is not required to create and pass excess legislation within the first three months of taking office as one of the most scrutinized, powerful, and public positions in the world. Imagine he (or she in a few years) has the opportunity to get acquainted with Congress, with the laws of the Nation, with foreign leaders, with his leadership style as president of the United States and does not have to feel the weight of the public and the media breathing down his neck. Those that would reject this anecdote regularly bring up the facts that the president is the most productive with Congress and legislation holistically in his first 100 days. While this tends to be true that a president gets more done with his congress in the first few months of his first term than in the rest of his time as president, it could be more beneficial to the world if that period of intense judgement was eliminated altogether.

If the president did not feel the pressure of the public and the media forcing him to perform at his best in his first months, there would be time for trust building that could have the potential to last more than just those first 100 days. Modern society has created a systemic problem for the president, however. By ingraining this idea of hyper-performance in the initial months in office, we show more interest for how quickly a president can work rather than how

effectively. Similarly, both Congress and the president could benefit from this symbiotic relationship of elongating the period of success because members of Congress and the president typically have a similar goal: the ever-looming hope of re-election. If each party leveraged the power of the other and worked over time to create lasting legislation, there would be greater opportunity for success over a long period of time rather than simply condensing it in a three month span.

The marker of the first 100 days create undue stress on the president to perform, are an illegitimate gauge for success, and perpetrate the need for rapidity in quantity before quality. It is not always the most helpful thing for a president to get into office and immediately start acting. It should be permissible and encouraged even to allow a president to outline his goals and get his feet under him before making decisions that could change the course of not only U.S. citizens, but people around the world. It is a useless gauge that, like many things in our governmental system, has seen better days.

## **Method - Case Studies**

It is clear why the 100 day marker was enacted and how Roosevelt used this self-imposed marker to garner fame and accolades from the public, but why has this simple benchmark persisted for so many years? What makes this amount of time so influential for the United States? To answer these questions, this paper proposes a case study of seven presidents and their first 100 days as a way to begin the study of the influence of this marker. Each case study will include a brief summary of the president and his work in Office, whether or not history remembers that president as a success or failure, and judges their first 100 days based on the criteria outlined below: quality vs. quantity of legislation, personality of a president, and political time. After analyzing each of the presidents and determining whether or not their first 100 days

had an impact on their complete administration, there will be a portion of alternate gauges that could and should be utilized in order to combat the negative effects of the first 100 day marker.

## **Measurements**

### **Quality vs. Quantity of Legislation**

This measure is used to give context to the efficiency of each president being studied. It is meant to quantify the amount of legislation passed in order to give an idea of a rating system to each of the case studies. By giving an idea of the number of bills passed and new legislation introduced, it will make the job of examining each president's actions clearer and more concise. It allows for an objective view into what they accomplished while in office. Using data collected for Political Scientist Casey Byrne Knudsen Dominguez's study of a president's first 100 days, statistics are clearly given to support the assumption that the leader of the free world has a "honeymoon period" with Congress and the American people. This allows him to legislate more freely, as well as retain high approval ratings for the various measures he enacts within those first months.

### **Personality of a President**

While it is true that Congress does play a major role in the ability of a president to pass legislation, much of his success or lack thereof comes down to his personality and the kind of politician he is while in Office. This is an idea that many political scientists have studied and affirmed and point out that even factors as relative as a president's personality have the ability to change the amount of success or failure he has while in office (Wayne - 2011, Neustadt - 1990, Kernell - 1986). For the simple fact that these components are so vast and studying each of them would take more time than any person would want to spend reading in a given paper, this paper focuses on three main items and how those elements contribute to the success of a president in

his first 100 days in Office. A study on the Personality and Character of Presidents yields information that is invaluable when looking at how the leader of the free world operates: “Historians believe that a president cannot be fairly assessed until he has been out of office for about thirty years.” And while this quote rings true for most of the case studies in this paper, it is important to still assess presidents who were recently in Office in order to identify similarities and patterns in governing styles (Rubenzer, 2004).

### **Political Time and Environment**

Lastly, as Genovese and Cronin (YEAR), Pika (YEAR), Neustadt (YEAR), and countless others have asserted, the political time and environment that a president is cast into will have great implications on how he is able to make decisions. If a president is in power in a time of peace and does not make any major legislative changes, it is probable that his approval ratings will be somewhat stagnate and could face trouble if he tries to run for re-election. As was seen with President George W. Bush's approval ratings, immediately after the 9/11 attacks, the Nation felt unified and stood together as one in nearly all of the actions he proposed. However, when the war on terror continued to persist, Bush slowly lost the support of the media and the Nation. Policymaking faculties are surely tested in the course of an administration, but the way that the public responds to those changes in policy have a large impact on the Office of the President as well. Though approval ratings are not what gets a president into Office, they may be what keeps him there if he tries to run for re-election.

### **Justification for Presidential Selections**

Each of the case studies included in this research were chosen for a specific purpose. Originally, they were to be chosen with an eight to ten year gap in between to observe the changes over a short period of time, however, this became problematic as many presidents died

or served multiple terms and did not match the prescribed timeline. Because there is no algorithm that fits the selection of each case, the reasoning for each president are outlined below. Warren Harding was selected because he held the Office of the president directly before FDR and before the first 100 days was explicitly addressed by the media and the public. Harding was selected to examine the prevalence of the 100 day marker, if any. Of course FDR was chosen because he is regarded as the founder of the marker and it is obvious that he must be included. John F. Kennedy was president nearly 20 years after FDR, and was chosen in order to investigate the evolution of the gauge from inception to modern presidency. Reagan held the office 20 years after JFK and was included, again, in order to see the change in the gauge with the rise of various platforms of the media. Similarly, Clinton and Obama were selected to inspect the changes in the marker as with the other modern presidents. Finally, Donald Trump was included in order to identify patterns and parallels that can be drawn with his historical predecessors.

### **Warren Harding**

Warren Harding was President from 1921-1923 and was instrumental in pulling the United States out from the turmoil of a failing economy in 1920. His work is largely forgotten when examining successful presidencies and although he is known as the president that ushered in the Age of Normalcy, he is remembered in the annals of time as a good worker, but one that seemed to be guided by those in his Office. He rarely made decisions for himself, and spent a great deal of time listening to the various sides of any argument before deciding on a course of action. Harding was a Republican from Ohio that began his political career as a Senator to the state, however, he is not remembered as a Senator that was highly successful or active. Though he did not make a huge legislative impact while working for the state of Ohio, he did acquire many key friendships and allies within the realm of local political influence. Using these allies



and with the Republican Convention for the presidential nomination at a deadlock between 3 candidates, Harding received the nomination because of his fame and because he was from Ohio. Evidently, he won the election and went on to enact major legislation within the first months of his presidency as is seen in below.

The quality of Harding's legislation that was created in the span of his first 100 days was far superior to the quantity produced and was what aided in restoring the economy prior to the Great Depression that began in 1929. Critics of the legislation assert that it was not good enough to save our failing economy on a long-term basis, and thereby, was insufficient as legislation to be enacted. Likewise, those that have studied the actions of President Harding in response to the depression that the United States was facing in 1921 also claim that because it was still early on in our history and that of our burgeoning economy, it is evident that the idea of countercyclical policy in economics had not yet been studied or introduced. This is why it can be explained that the economy bounced back so quickly, but then fell again in 1929; history that is not studied is bound to repeat itself, whether it is good or bad (Woods 2009).

One of the most controversial debates of the time, however, was whether or not Harding and his administration would support the Veterans' Bonus: a measure that gave a "cash out" to soldiers who had been fighting in World War I. Ultimately, with Congress divided, not on party lines or partisan voting ideals, Harding stuck to his original feelings and did not support the bonus: he claimed that the Veterans' hard work was greatly appreciated by the Nation, but that the Treasury could not afford to take a hit at the caliber that it would be receiving via the bonus (the bill was later passed through the House and the Senate in September of 1922, but Harding vetoed it and was sustained to prevent the bill from passing once again [Ahner 2017]).

This was not the only thing on Warren Harding's agenda for the first 100 days, however (it should be noted that the marker for the first 100 days had not yet been enacted, as it was created with FDR's presidency, however, Harding clearly makes a point to begin to enact legislation quickly upon coming to Office, and did his best to act hastily after election). At the top of his list of things to do while in Office, Harding pledged to reduce income taxes, increase tariffs to create more profit for American farmers, and include more funding and support for infrastructure projects Nationwide. By outlining his goals with Congress early, Harding was able to pass a swift emergency tariff increase for farmers and did it within the first few months. Similarly, he delegated his Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, to work on providing aid to Russia during the famine in the Country in the early spring of 1921. The Thomson-Urrutia Treaty with Colombia was another hallmark of Harding's administration, though it went against his previous missions of reducing expenditures and cutting the ever-growing debt that the United States was experiencing after World War I. The grant was in the amount of \$25,000,000 and was created to acknowledge the American intervention and inflammation of Columbia's Panamanian revolution of 1903 in which the U.S. signed a treaty with Panama to ensure their independence from Columbia and use that region's isthmus for trade. Columbia did not agree to the treaty, but the United States proceeded with trade in the territory anyway and blocked the Columbian military from intervening while simultaneously giving financial compensation to Panama. This obviously created tensions between Columbia and the United States as well as Panama and Columbia. By Warren Harding addressing this injustice to Columbia, though the Nation was not fully satisfied, it began to ease the strain and the monetary relief gave a small amount of closure to the wrongs done by America (Ahner 2017, Panama Declares Independence). In the final days of the first 100 of his administration, Harding turned to common ground for the past era of

presidents since around 1880: he worked with Congress to pass anti-lynching laws and orchestrated the beginning of the only law to stand the tests of time which was ultimately passed in 1922.

The personality of Warren G. Harding is one that truly is unique to him and even now, seems difficult to characterize. He was a poor decision and policymaker and is often remembered as someone that was more impressed by the power of the office he held than anything else. As was previously mentioned, he was not entirely decisive, and in many history books, it is recorded that his wife was “domineering” and told him what to do and how to be, to which he would most likely comply. While none of these traits seem particularly likeable, or that of a president, he was regarded as a largely well-liked individual, mostly after his stint as Senator of Ohio. It was said that although he could easily be persuaded or bought out by politicians, his colleagues and friends knew him to be outspoken and to give a rousing speech (Bailey 1945, Ahner 2017, Frederick 2013). Unfortunately, due to poor appointments and a mistress, there is an air of mystery as well as secrecy that shrouds what could have been a seemingly harmless and even successful presidency. He is also remembered as one that was not competent or qualified to fill the Office of the President. Although he was well-liked, he could do little with his staff or power that the President should have; he is often at the bottom of polls when it comes to success of presidents, but near the top when looking at likeability and extrovertedness of presidents of the past (Rubenzer 2004). It is not imperative that all presidents take a firm stance on each issue they face, only that they hear each issue with an open-mind and work for the best interest of the American people. Harding, however, is not remembered kindly by political scientists because of his inability to make meaningful legislation (on his own), and the scandals that inevitably followed him to his untimely death in 1923.

As for the political time that President Harding found himself in, the unfortunate effects of a postwar economy were just beginning to take their toll in wreaking havoc across the Western Hemisphere. Not only was the United States' economy hurting, but our allies across the globe were in need of various forms of aid. This was also a pivotal time for President Harding to decide whether or not the U.S. would join the League of Nations as Wilson had been petitioning throughout the course of his administration; ultimately, Harding decided against supporting even a highly watered down version. The makeup of Harding's Congress was largely a Republican majority in both the House and the Senate and this allowed the president to pass bills through the body with relative ease. A final note on the political time of Harding's Presidency is that with the Roaring Twenties nipping at the heels of the Age of Normalcy and the economy slowly on the rise with new jobs on the horizon, Americans were not prepared for all that society was about to offer them. They were optimistic after Harding's short time in Office and were beginning to have hope in government again, this is due in part to the work that was done by Warren Harding and his Congress (Frederick 2013, Ahner 2017, and WhiteHouse.gov). In retrospect, because Warren Harding's presidency was fraught with scandal and characterized by a tendency to be indecisive, his administration is often seen as a failure. If he is remembered by scholars or political scientists at all, it is for his meager attempt to rectify a failing economy which, as stated previously, did prove to be successful, but not for the long run. If one was analyzing Harding's first 100 days, they would likely rate it as a success, however, these first few months clearly had no bearing on how Harding was remembered after his administration had run its course.

### **John F. Kennedy**

President from 1961-1963, John F. Kennedy is still remembered as one of America's most well-liked presidents and one that always put the good of the Country above himself. JFK's

entrance into politics was a family affair and even still, much of his success is attributed to the support and guidance of those ties and the gravitas his name held. His older brother was the one intending to go into politics and John was planning on living his life as a writer; when his brother, Joseph, died in World War II, JFK made it his life mission to carry on the work in politics that his brother had planned on doing upon returning from the war. In 1946 he became a member in the House of Representatives from the 11th District of Massachusetts after which he went to Washington to work as a Senator. In his time in Washington, he did not accomplish very much for his district, but he wrote books and met powerful people and slowly began to gain confidence and fame among the voters of his era. In 1956, Kennedy turned his eye to the Democratic Presidential Nomination of 1960, and with the help of his family and a close group of policy experts, Kennedy made his way around the country talking about his ideas on foreign policy and public housing. He won the election of 1960 against Vice-Presidential incumbent and Presidential candidate, Richard Nixon and went on to surround himself with Democrats within his cabinet and in any appointment he could make. JFK made sure to include the public and hear as many differing opinions and ideas from his Cabinet as he could. The American people responded enthusiastically to this handsome young man who promised bold strokes against their Cuban enemies and a stronger hand in Vietnamese involvement than previous administration's had shown. The tactic of "Going Public" seemed to bode well with JFK, and after the CIA and his administration suffered great losses in the infamous Bay of Pigs, Kennedy's approval ratings skyrocketed simply because of his honesty and directness to the American people. The mishap was on the 87th day of his presidency and though it had the potential to derail the entire administration and their foreign policy goals, he and his closest advisers decided to continue with the plans that they had. Domestically, Kennedy did not work to do very much for the American

people; there were various legislative changes that were made, but they are remembered mostly as substantive changes and not anything to change the course of history or the world. In regards to the Cold War, JFK did little to quell the tensions rising between the United States and the Soviets and in his first 100 days, he and the rest of the Nation watched our foreign enemies send the first manned spaceship into space and win the race to the stars. Each of these actions, or lack thereof in the first 100 days of John F. Kennedy's presidency should be a clear indicator that those first months in Office were not widely regarded as a success for his administration (Sellen 2013).

The personality of the thirty-fifth President of the United States was what drew so many people to him, and in turn, was what drove his approval ratings to be among the highest of some of the most memorable presidents' in the Nation's history. JFK is remembered as being a charismatic and hard-working leader who benefitted from listening to all sides of debate before making important decisions. He tended to have less formal meetings and allow his advisers and friends to discuss matters with him casually. An excerpt from the book, *Great Lives in History*, remembers JFK as such: "A handsome face, no longer gaunt and pained, the thatch of hair, plus Kennedy's spontaneity and wit, captivated millions." Though he was not particularly concerned about his character or bothered by a recognizable moral compass, Kennedy was a clear extrovert and open to the media and the public about nearly everything in his life. He was a president that sought adventure not only in his life, but in his decision-making and was remembered as having many positive feelings and insight for his close friends. The character of a president feeds into every aspect of policy making as well as how the leader of the United States is perceived by the rest of the world and their leaders. Though JFK lived a fairly promiscuous life and could not be troubled to stay out of trouble, he is remembered as one of the most universally well-liked

presidents and one of the most charismatic leaders the country has ever had (Rubenzer 2004). His self-imposed security can be seen in the way that he conducted himself after making mistakes: he was honest personally and with the American people and never shied away from owning up to his mistakes or offering an apology as evidenced by the Bay of Pigs fiasco. It is possible that Kennedy's assassination immortalized the love that many Americans already felt toward their magnetic leader and made him into a martyr for freedom and democracy. Regardless, Kennedy's personality certainly contributed to his success early on in his presidency and in the course of the one-thousand days he spent in Office collectively. He was also recorded with eighty-three percent approval, the highest rating after his first 100 days than any president before or after him

The time that JFK saw while serving as president of the United States has been briefly described as a time of tumultuous relations between Cuba and the U.S., tension between Vietnam and their neighbors, and domestically, a time of civil rights action and precedent setting. 1961 was the post World War II era that shaped much of the Civil Rights debate as well as exploration of space. JFK was instrumental in bringing the issues of race and equality to the forefront and although he did not have as large a presence as many other presidents have had domestically, he proved his worth (eventually) abroad with his foreign policy initiatives and military presence (Taylor 2011). In Congress, the Democrats had the majority in both the Senate and the House and this boded well for the president as he was fairly free to legislate as his party liked.

In summary, John F. Kennedy's first 100 days in office were rife with hardships and failure, yet he is still remembered as one of the greatest presidents of all time. History has remembered him as a martyr, though his moral compass never truly seemed to be intact; he is loved in the States, though he did not accomplish much within our borders; JFK is proof that

even if the first 100 days are not successful, there is still a chance to be remembered as a triumphant hero of American politics and policy.

## **Ronald Reagan**

Another universally well-liked president and charismatic leader, Ronald Reagan served the American people in the Office of the President from 1981-1989. Reagan is known for his appearances in nearly 55 feature-length films as well as his work as governor of California from 1967-1975. He spent much of his life working toward making sure that his constituents felt heard and cared for while he was in whatever office he held and was also known for his work toward equality and tax cuts. Reagan was born in a small town in Illinois and raised conservatively, however started out in politics as a liberal Democrat that supported FDR. He joined the Republican Party shortly after leaving Hollywood because he thought that government intervention was too great, even during his time as an actor. Because of his career in show business and broadcasting, he quickly rose to fame and though he was more popular for his work on the radio, it was his familiarity with the American public that made him a prime candidate for the Republican Party.

Reagan's first 100 days may be among the most memorable in America's history. Though it was not distinguished by a great deal of legislation or policymaking, the advances that were made were groundbreaking and the effects have stood the test of time. Within the first hour of Reagan's Presidency, rather, as he was being sworn in, American hostages that had been held in Iran for nearly 450 days were released and allowed to come back to the United States. Though Carter had been in intense negotiations with the Iranian government and it is possible that these talks had to do with the eventual success, the victory is credited to Reagan's administration because with the new president came their freedom. In the course of his campaign, the candidate



Reagan promised that one of the first things he would do upon being elected was to get a handle on government hiring and spending; after his inaugural address, he fulfilled that promise and put a freeze on government hiring so as to begin that process (McClure 2013). Another huge event that stands out to historians when reviewing Reagan's first days in Office was the attempted assassination that came on day 70 and made the 40th President of the United States a household name and hero (CNN 2017). The final element of note in Reagan's first 100 days were his proposed tax cuts as well as increased military spending. He was a strong advocate of each of these initiatives and even though he did not have the majority in Congress, he was a fierce debater and was able to push much of his legislation through with little to no changes to the original document (Page 2013).

The personality of Ronald Reagan is what many have attributed his great successes to. Not only was he an extrovert and easy to talk to, he also was a clear and powerful communicator that rarely found himself on the losing side of an argument. In Rubenzer's assessment of presidential personality and psychological traits that contributed to success and failure in office, he offers this assertion about President Ronald Reagan: "He coped well under stress, did not blame himself if things went wrong, and did not let minor problems upset him. Reagan was decidedly shallow, nonintellectual, and unreflective, yet clearly skilled at imaginative play. He had an active imagination and often viewed his problems as president in terms of movie plots and motifs. His only contribution during a high-level discussion of the MX missile was to relate the lesson of the movie War Games. He did not approach problems in a quantitative, scientific manner, was not good with numbers, and quickly lost interest in abstract, theoretical discussions." Similarly, his biographer recounts that Reagan was well-liked and social and tried to take risks at every opportunity that he could, be it in policymaking or simply his daily life

(Rubenzer 2013). Generally, President Reagan was reliable and organized and tended to have more informal meetings with aids and advisors. He was also characterized by a big heart and was known to be swayed by his emotions when legislating. For example, if he was cutting funding for some group or cause, he was known to write personal checks to the people being affected by the legislation and would almost always change his mind if he were faced with a real person talking to him and expressing their concerns.

Because Reagan was president in the time of the Cold War, much of his policies and legislation reflected a desire to quell Communism and increase freedom at home and abroad. As previously mentioned, he reflected these values by pouring money into the United States' military and attempting to intervene by selling arms in return for the freedom of hostages. In the next few weeks of Reagan's administration, El Salvador became more and more violent through the offensives of guerillas and Mexico and France identified the attackers as having political ties and acted on them as such (History 2011). The economy at the time of Reagan's administration was not good by any means and though he spent most of his time in office cutting taxes and reducing government regulations, a recession swept the Nation in the summer of 1981 and did not conclude until the fall of the following year (Sablik 2013). Reagan worked with a primarily Democrat House majority and a Republican Senate majority from the middle to the end of his administration (Smitha 2015). This majority is largely what helped him cut taxes and reduce government funded programs and jobs and what may have made him a successful president in the early years of modern Presidencies.

### **Bill Clinton**

To many scholars and political scientists alike, it is interesting that while a great majority of presidents had torrid affairs while in Office, only one has been impeached for being with

someone and lying under oath about it. Unfortunately, Bill Clinton is remembered by many solely for this affair and much of his other legislation and positive work for the economy is oftentimes forgotten. Clinton's career in politics began in a lackluster way: working for a campaign in Arkansas that failed miserably and running for office himself and losing badly. He turned his career around in 1976 and won the Attorney General Chairmanship of the State of Arkansas where he proved to be a valuable asset and moved on to be Governor at the age of thirty-two. He was defeated in the next election, but refocused himself and his image and managed to regain the role from 1982 until 1990 when he set his sights on becoming the Democratic National Convention's candidate for the 1993 presidential election. Clinton was facing George H. W. Bush, the Republican incumbent in the race for president, and he was nearly derailed for allegations concerning an affair, similar to allegations which plagued his career as Governor of Arkansas. However, running on a campaign of ending the recession, creating more jobs, and offering health care for the disadvantaged, he beat out Bush to become the forty-second President of the United States (Riedinger 2013).

Clinton's first 100 days are remembered as some of the most unorganized and tumultuous of all forty-five presidents. First, he was unable to appoint an Attorney General, due to different scandals, after numerous attempts which delayed the appointments of thousands of justices and various other positions until nearly mid-March. Similarly, because so much investigation went into this one appointment, all the other nominations that had been made by President Clinton, or that were being made were examined all the more closely. In the early days of his presidency, Clinton also sought to fulfill his campaign promise of allowing openly homosexual individuals the right to serve in the armed forces, however, after much debate between his Office, lobbyist groups, and the military itself, the compromise that emerged from the talks is known as the

“Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” provision. This allowed homosexual individuals to serve in the U.S. military as long as they did not blatantly profess their sexual orientation. Though this was a somewhat bipartisan effort and hinged mostly on large compromises (something that is few and far between in the Congress meetings of today), Democrats saw this measure as a loss because it did not offer enough protection for homosexuals; likewise, Republicans also viewed the measure as a loss due to the nature of what was being passed and their belief that gay and lesbian individuals should not be allowed to serve at all. Another sizable piece of contention within the first 100 days was in regards to the White House Travel Office. Upon finding certain discrepancies in the budgetary actions of the WHTO, the administration fired 7 employees to which many believed was not only unjust, but also unfair because President Clinton filled the positions with either friends, or colleagues he had known for some time. Finally, one of his main campaign promises was cutting taxes for the middle class and within the 100 day marker, he promised such a cut and reallocation of budget funds in order to accommodate for these changes. However, upon releasing his official budget, middle class Americans were dismayed to find that the promised tax cuts were nowhere to be found. Just about the only piece of legislation that was popular in his first 100 days was the Family and Medical Leave Act which allowed employees to take unpaid leave for medical emergencies. This was not only an effort to bring both political parties together, but also one that resonated well with the American people. The final mark of failure in Clinton’s first 100 days was his healthcare plan headed by his wife which was intended to give universal health care access to all Americans. This was not voted on in the first months of his administration, it was only proposed, but the measure did not pass into law (Ahner 2017, Riedinger 2013).

The personality and working style of President Clinton within his first 100 days are both factors that contributed to his turbulent and unproductive first weeks in Office. Because of his inability to command a room or control his cabinet, he enlisted Leon Panetta to take control as Chief of Staff, however, this did not take place until mid-July. His guidance and leadership are what turned the administration around and allowed each member of the staff to have a better understanding of their role and their job in the course of the Presidency. Clinton was known to be a big extravert and is often compared to JFK, surprisingly, in regards to likeability and communication styles. Clinton was particularly talkative and agreeable, more so than the average extraverted president, according to Rubenzer's assessment of the psychological aspects of the presidency. President Clinton was always willing to read through countless pages of legislation so that he could understand all sides of an argument, but felt that having controversial speakers for or against a topic was too confusing for himself and his staff to vote on. He was known to be impulsive and prone to angry hostility; on the other hand, he was highly charismatic and open to speaking to many different people. Clinton's personality is similar to many of the presidents included in these case studies, and his characteristics are those of both successful and unsuccessful presidents.

Bill Clinton saw a great deal of economic strife during his presidency, as many of the case studies used in this paper did. He also faced a few minor terrorist attacks in the early days of his presidency, which surprisingly, went relatively unnoticed. Similarly, NATO and NAFTA were hot topics for conversation in the time of his presidency and while he supported NAFTA, he worked with foreign governments to control the flights of unknown military crafts over Bosnia-Herzegovina (Smitha 2015). Clinton saw a Democratic majority in the House and the Senate, however, he still had difficulty and experienced failure in attempting to pass legislation

and healthcare overhaul in particular. As per the usual, there was a significant amount of distrust from the American public toward the government and this translated into Clinton's approval ratings. He did manage to pass his budget with higher taxes for the middle class with highly democratic support, but he used his time in office to focus in on what programs truly needed funding as well as the domestic endeavors that could receive funding.

### **Barack Obama**

Though each of these case studies have been monumental in one way or another, perhaps none of them have held such gravitas as the first black president of the United States, Barack Obama. He did not always have his mind set on politics, and upon graduating law school, began practicing law in Chicago on Civil Rights. He also taught in Chicago and picked back up on his work for the misfortunate, a passion that he had explored much of his early life due in great part to his late mother. He began his career in politics by representing the Thirteenth District in the Illinois State Senate. Though he was derailed for a short period, he quickly regained his original position by beating out a Republican nominee and went back to focusing his efforts on the underprivileged and labor interests and equality. After his time in the Senate, he set his sights on winning the Democratic Presidential Nomination and beat out Hillary Clinton for the spot. Following his nomination, he went on to engage an entirely new and somewhat forgotten bracket of voters and mobilized them enough to win the Presidential Election of 2008 in order to become the forty-fourth President of the United States of America.

President Obama was well-liked by the public and referred to as the "obvious choice" in the election. However, despite his approval ratings before entering Office, his honeymoon period was short lived. Obama wasted no time becoming useful and passing a great deal of legislation as soon as his administration got in the door. In his first days in Office, President Obama

curtailed money going to staff members in the White House who were receiving more than \$100,000 a year, created a National Day of Renewal and Reconciliation (to recognize survivors and those battling heart diseases), signed an executive order to close the Guantanamo Bay detention camps and made it illegal to use certain forms of torture. Each of these measures are still active and observed by Congress. In the next days he stopped funding to counseling and abortion services that the U.S. was paying for overseas, ordered military air strikes on Pakistan, and cut out unnecessary hires within the White House staff (Ahner 2017). Because he was in Office during one of the worst financial crises of the modern world, he worked with Congress to pass a \$787 million stimulus package by his thirtieth day (Pruitt 2017). By the end of January, he signed the Fair Pay Act which called for equality of pay regardless of sex, race, or age and by the beginning of February created a cap on the funds to bail out large corporations in danger of going bankrupt. As Commander in Chief, President Obama approved the deployment of 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan and announced his latest strategy on how to deal with the relations in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Obama traveled more in his first 100 days than any other president, visiting 9 countries and countless cities in between. He not only created a level of respect for himself by visiting countries across the world, but he also showed that the United States was willing to work with neighbors and allies around the world. To conclude his first months in Office, President Obama and his Democratic Congress passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act which was intended to keep existing jobs while simultaneously creating new ones retained the fourth highest approval rating since 1953. Even though his approval rating was high, (Ahner 2017, Pruitt 2017, Riedinger 2013).

As a president, Obama was known to be an ambitious policymaker and prioritized minority groups getting their voices heard above all else. He was accommodating and generally

inviting, yet had a tendency to seem distant and cold. Because he was raised by a mother who valued community-service and giving back to the people that have given to you, Obama relied a great deal on his morals and ability to stand for those who have been voiceless for so long.

Similarly, in his book, *Personality and Politics: Obama For and Against Himself*, political scientist Stephen Wayne talks about how the president had difficulty “finding himself” in his early years. Because he was not accepted by much of his community that he was raised in, it was imperative that he find his sense of worth through his work for his constituents and this constant need for approval fueled him on a daily basis (Personality 2012, Wayne 2012). In a study conducted by the Unit for the Study of Personality in Politics an organization that analyzes presidents based on their personality traits, Obama scored highly on his ability to be uniquely conscientious and dominant. This is clear in the way that he governed and his ability to make important decisions on his own or with the help of a few very close staff members in the White House. Though he seemed like a confident and collected individual from his speeches and many interviews on late night television, Barack Obama was also known to be somewhat of a recluse while in Office and often shied away from large crowds or gatherings so as to have time to himself to think or read about a decision he knew was looming on the horizon (Personality 2012). He had a strong moral compass that guided his decisions and attributed many of his humanitarian efforts and initiatives to the impact that his mother had on him. He was conscious of various religions but also acknowledged the separation of church and state: “I am a big believer in the separation of church and state. I am a big believer in our constitutional structure. . . I am a great admirer of our founding charter, and its resolve to prevent theocracies from forming, and its resolve to prevent disruptive strains of fundamentalism from taking root in this country.” Because of his belief in strong government and his creation of the stimulus packages



that were intended to revive the economy, it is easy to assert that he believed a great deal in government and what it could do for the Nation. Obama held his diverse upbringing close to his heart and he remains one of the most efficient and monumental presidents of the 100 day marker.

As many may remember, President Obama found himself facing one of the greatest recessions of modern America. It took a great deal of time and effort to reverse the trends of the downturned economy and lack of jobs on the market. Immigration was also a hot-ticket item (as it is presently) and because of the kind of president that he was, he valued foreign policy goals and working with allies overseas to accomplish a similar goal. The environment held a high priority in the eyes of the president and the Nation and this priority took the form of the Paris Accords within which the initiatives managed to reduce the negative effects of climate change in carbon emissions by nearly forty million metric tons. He also operated with a Republican majority in the House for his first years, but a Democratic majority in the House and Senate from the middle to end of his administration (Kurtzleben 2017). Though he needed his Democratic majority for support, he focused on bipartisanship early on to accomplish his goals: A major component of the president's legislative strategy, bipartisan-ship, had become undone at the very time that another component of that strategy, restoring the institutional balance between Congress and the presidency by asking Democratic committee chairs to draft the legislation his administration wanted, was creating internal dissent, slowing down the legislative process, and subjecting it to greater and more critical press scrutiny.

This quote from Wayne's book shows that although Obama attempted bipartisanship, as the parties became more polarized, he was unable to work with them individually as his administration came to a close. (Wayne 2013).

## **Donald Trump**

Using the examples of the previous case studies, this paper will now analyze the correlations that can be drawn for the remainder of the Presidency of the incumbent Donald Trump. His whirlwind presidency began nearly a year ago and his rise to political prominence began not much longer than a year. His rise to become the Republican candidate was clouded in secrecy and scandal and he is still enduring the consequences of many of his actions and inflammatory interactions with his staff and the American public. He was known for most of his life as a billionaire businessman with a mind only for himself and his net worth, and when he announced his candidacy for president as a Republican, he did not receive the support of the party and many people thought he was running as a joke. Upon his arrival to Office, President Trump utilized the executive order a great deal to make good on the campaign promises that he had stood by so fiercely. Similarly, he has worked toward ensuring that only U.S. citizens are allowed within the borders of America. Part of the platform he ran on engaged a new demographic of voters by acting upon the desires of a pure Country and one that got back to “what the Framers had intended.” Many of his executive orders have been overturned by Congress, not long after, or before the legislation has had any influence. This paper was intended to analyze what implications President Trump’s actions in his first 100 days have on the rest of his presidency, however, his actions have been so sporadic that it is hard to gauge with any certainty what his political actions will look like. That being said, his excessive use of executive orders are reminiscent of Barack Obama’s, though many of President Obama’s orders were enacted and though President Trump claims that he has passed more legislation than any president since Harry Truman, his statistics are unfortunately, fake news. According to Politifact, Trump has actually signed the least amount of bills in his first year since JFK. Despite the fact

that he believes that the sheer quantity of legislation is enough to propel him to the forefront of presidential success, the amount of legislation and executive action that has been overturned is far and above the amount that has truly been produced. His personality speaks for itself and while he may be unorganized, unaware of the political process, and incapable of staffing his own staff, this is not unlike many of the presidents that have run the Country; his first 100 days are much like Bill Clinton's were and it is probable that all Trump needs is a strong voice and politically astute individual to take the reins for him as Leon Panetta did for Clinton.

Correspondingly, the political time he finds himself in is unlike that of any other president previously studied. Uprisings and riots are a norm, racism is again on the rise, and while the economy was one of the biggest issues of the other case studies, it may be the least of President Trump's worries. Not only are their tensions between the political parties within the Nation, but the U.S. faces tension between foreign ties such as North Korea who threatens nuclear attacks weekly and with Russia who's government is under constant scrutiny and investigation for having ties to many of Trump's scandals. These reasons are why Donald Trump's presidency are difficult to study and even though Republicans hold the majority in both the House and the Senate, President Trump has proven that it takes more than a unified political party to unify the goals of a Nation.

## **Conclusion**

This study has yielded interesting results that were not anticipated at the outset. Though it cannot be asserted with complete certainty, from the case studies, if a president has a relatively unsuccessful first 100 days in Office, there is still a high probability that he will have a successful presidency as a whole, with the exception of FDR. Warren Harding accomplished a great deal in his first 100 days, but not in his entire presidency and he is not remembered well by

the public (if he is remembered at all). Franklin D. Roosevelt, of course, was highly successful both in his first 100 days and in his entire presidency and is remembered fondly by history. John F. Kennedy, though successful in his first months and remembered with fondness and a sense of heroism, did not do much for domestic or foreign policy and thus could be considered an unsuccessful president. Ronald Reagan had early success in his initial days (or hours) of his presidency, but by the end it was thrown off by the assassination attempt and the rest of his presidency did not see a great deal of action, however, he is universally known and liked. Bill Clinton's 100 day marker was filled with confusion, and though he had a successful presidency following, it was filled with scandal and he is not remembered fondly by Americans. Finally, President Obama had an extremely active first 100 days and a relatively obstacle driven remainder of his time in Office, though he too is well-liked, according to most approval rating polls.

Regardless of how the evidence presents itself, it is my assertion that the 100 day marker is an invalid measure for how successful or not a president will be. The research showed that if the first 100 days were successful, it was likely that the remainder of the administration laid low and did not create much meaningful legislation. Researchers are finding more and more that while the public may appreciate this marker, it does nothing for the success of a president and thus should be done away with altogether.

"The dangerous thing is that this has become this talisman. You invoke the first 100 days," O'Mara says. "And now nearly every subsequent president, you see the 100-day mark roll around and reporters write this whole raft of stories about how he's doing, and talk to voters who say they haven't seen results. It's become solidified and politicians play into this, Trump included, by going out on the campaign trail and saying pretty bold

things about what they're going to do and how they're going to do it fast (Rothman 2017).”

This quote was included in a study of the first 100 days and shows that it gives the president a false sense of accomplishment and rushes him to produce something of merit show his constituents. President Obama had it right when he worked on various pieces of bipartisan legislation early on in his “honeymoon” period with Congress, but even that did not last long. Even FDR, the founder and perfecter of the 100 day marker did not see results that he could give to his constituents within his first months. This gauge causes undue stress, creates an unnecessary rush on legislation, and forces the president to use executive action in order to accomplish anything. Because this measure was created and given credit on a whim, it should not continue to characterize the first months of a president’s work in Office. The marker is not only detrimental to the psyche of a president and his administration, it also does nothing to prove the efficiency or capability of himself and his White House staff. The measure can be undone as easily as it was created but it is up to the public and the media to put this useless marker to rest.

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